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SOME FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED IN CONDUCTING A COLLEGE-ADULT READING PROGRAM.

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FACTORS CONSIDERED CRUCIAL IN CONDUCTING A COLLEGE-ADULT READING PROGRAM BY THE WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY READING STAFF ARE PRESENTED AS A GUIDE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW READING PROGRAMS ON THIS LEVEL. EIGHT PRINCIPLES DERIVED FROM EXPERIENCE WITH THE 22-YEAR-OLD WESTERN MICHIGAN READING PROGRAM CONCERNING TEACHER ROLE, A STUDENT'S UNDERSTANDING OF HIS READING ABILITY, STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR READING IMPROVEMENT, SETTING UP READING OBJECTIVES, PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS WHICH MAY AFFECT READING, SEQUENTIAL AND MEANINGFUL READING TRAINING, INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURES, AND A STUDENT'S EVALUATION OF HIS READING ACHIEVEMENT ARE DISCUSSED. HEAVY EMPHASIS IS PLACED ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ADAPTING THE PROGRAM TO EACH INDIVIDUAL. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WESTERN MICHIGAN PROGRAM REVEALS THE CHANGES WHICH HAVE TAKEN PLACE FROM 1944 TO 1966. REFERENCES ARE GIVEN. (LS)

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SOME FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED IN CONDUCTING A COLLEGE-ADULT READING PROGRAM

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The college-adult reading program at Western Michigan University was initiated in 1944. Since that time several thousand college students and adults have been involved in its activities. These people have ranged in reading ability from the third percentile to the 99th percentile as evaluated in terms of college-adult norms. Participants have been freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, graduate

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students, university faculty members, and adults in the community. They have ranged in age from 16 to 65 years.

During this time aims, materials, and procedures utilized in the program have changed. In the beginning the approach was primarily clinical in nature. Classes were limited to twelve students, and many types of practice exercises designed to accomplish specific objectives were used. Later the clinical approach was replaced by a thorough-going developmental program. Classes of 36 and 40 students are now common. Class procedures consist of lectures, demonstrations, and laboratory work. Individual conferences with students are encouraged. Students are shown how to apply reading procedures directly to their academic work and are taught how to read their college textbooks. (3) Skill-drill materials have been reduced to a minimum.

Gradually during these twenty-two years of experience, several principles have evolved which we believe are essential to successful instruction in reading at the college-adult level. We believe that these principles may be helpful to others who are planning to establish new college-adult reading programs. Furthermore, in our opinion, these principles can be useful in the evaluation of programs already in existence.

PRINCIPLE 1: The teacher must stimulate, inform, and guide. The teacher of reading at the college-adult level has three specific functions. It is his responsibility to stimulate, to inform, and to guide. In this sequence the emphasis should be placed upon stimulation and guidance rather than upon the process of providing information about reading which the student may feel is quite unrelated to his work in the university. In general, students do not hunger and thirst for information concerning how to read until they understand that reading skill is directly related to their success in college. They need to be shown how increased facility in the use of their textbooks can bring both an economy of time and effort and how the development of skills in using their textbooks can result in increased scholarship as indicated by grades earned in their college classes. The whole process is goal oriented, and progress toward the student's objectives is facilitated by stimulation, information, and guidance provided by the instructor.

PRINCIPLE 2: Every student should know how well he reads and should select for himself the specific reading skills he needs to acquire. Tests having educational

significance to the student can be administered at the second meeting of the class. This evaluation provides both student and teacher with information concerning the student's reading level and furnishes a point of reference for determining change taking place between the time of initial and final testing. The student should be concerned not only with the quantitative but with the qualitative factors as well. In other words, he should know not only his reading level but what skills he possesses and what skills he does not possess. A study by McGinnis (7) in 1961 indicated that 30 per cent of over 1,000 college freshmen said that in their opinion they were not reading well enough to do satisfactory academic work. They pointed out that they did not know how to read a chapter effectively, how to increase their vocabularies, nor how to improve their spelling. Furthermore, they added that they did not know how to evaluate a writer's bias and preconceived ideas nor how to adjust their rate of reading to the nature and difficulty of the material being read. An informal reading inventory which has been developed by our staff can help the student identify some of the skills he may need to acquire. Does he need to increase rate? Does he need to enlarge his vocabulary? Does he need to learn how

to read various forms of literature? Does he need to learn how to do directed reading? These are but some of the qualitative aspects which he should consider. As Logan (5) has pointed out, "Real learning occurs when each individual becomes his own center, focus, and occasion for learning." It is assumed that goals set up by the student will have more meaning to him than those imposed upon him by the instructor.

PRINCIPLE 3: The student should understand that he can improve his reading ability and that the responsibility for doing so rests with him. Many of the students who enroll in college-adult reading programs feel inadequately prepared to cope with the reading assignments required by their professors. Some of them have experienced academic failure and lack confidence in their ability. They need to improve their self concept and to modify their attitudes toward themselves. Attitudes can be changed so that the student recognizes that he is the master of his own choices. The teacher can provide students with evidence that others have increased their reading skills and can indoctrinate them with the belief that what others have done, they can do. They need tangible proof that they can improve and that they

are improving. Instructors can show by their actions and words that they have confidence in the effectiveness of the materials they are presenting and that they are aware of the effort the students are putting forth to become better readers. Praise and commendation are essential.

At the same time the student should realize that the responsibility for improvement is his. No one can give him a magic potion which will improve his reading ability overnight. The student must want to improve, and he must be willing to put forth effort to improve. The instructor can help him develop insight into the causes of his difficulties. The teacher can stimulate, inform, and guide, but the responsibility for improvement remains with the student. The learner must have confidence in his ability to improve and be willing to extend himself in order to become an effective reader.

PRINCIPLE 4: Each student should be given an opportunity to set up his own reading objectives and to attain them at his own rate and in accordance with his own plan. College students are young adults who have goals and attitudes which must be considered by their instructor. Their improvement in reading will occur when they fulfill their academic

needs more satisfactorily. Reading must be experienced. It must be practiced and not merely learned about. It is to the student's advantage to use his own subject matter, determine his own objectives, and follow his own plan. He may be reading, for example, a social studies book that is prepared for graduate students while he is reading only as well as a person in the seventh grade. It may be possible for the instructor to suggest to him references written at his reading level which will be of value to him and which will build mental content and consequently make it possible for him to get more information out of his advanced text. This is the instructor's opportunity and his responsibility.

A freshman in the university, for example, has been required in one of his classes to prepare a paper showing his reactions to Man's Search for Meaning by Frankl. The concepts in this book must be identified, interpreted, and evaluated in terms of the mental content of the student. Cause and effect relationships must be discovered. This young student who is enrolled in adult reading hopes to gain from the class suggestions as to how he can accomplish his purpose. The instructor may discover that eight other students are concerned with the same problem, and consequently

it will be advisable to focus temporarily the content of his lecture and demonstrations upon the reading requirements of these students. He can show how the students should ask questions, look for answers, and confer with one another in order to reinforce their mental content. He can suggest plans for organization of ideas and show how facts are required to support valid conclusions. As students progress in the realization of their goals and as their needs are satisfied, reading skills emerge. Each student should be regarded and treated as a unique individual. Why should all our students do the same thing at the same time and in the same way? This may be easier for the instructor but it is most unfortunate for the student.

PRINCIPLE 5: Attention should be given to physical, psychological, and environmental factors which may be affecting reading. Although we at Western Michigan University have rejected a clinical approach to reading problems at the university level, we believe that we must consider the student's needs in terms of physical, psychological, and environmental factors which can affect his performance in reading. In our academic world today physical factors such as vision, hearing, and general health are taken care of

through the campus health service. The instructor, however, must be alert in identifying students who need this service. Sociological factors which we have found directly related to experiential background and mental content are also important. In a recent study (7) made by the staff of the Psycho-Educational Clinic 55 per cent of over 1,000 college freshmen reported that they were experiencing considerable difficulty in interpreting the information presented to them in lectures and in their textbooks. Why did they have this difficulty? Was their background inadequate? If so, to what extent was the home responsible for this lack of mental content? In attempting to secure answers to these questions, an investigation (2) was made of the attitudes of 100 parents of superior college readers and 100 parents of inferior college readers. It was found that mothers and fathers of superior readers differ significantly from mothers and fathers of inferior readers in their attitudes toward the value of reading, the development of language skills, and the building of background. The fathers and mothers of inferior readers expressed attitudes which suggest that reading is relatively unimportant and of limited value, that children should be discouraged from expressing their ideas, and that children should be restricted from

participating in activities which can provide information and experiential background related to reading and language skills. The student sees with what he has seen and hears with what he has heard. Meaning in any situation, listening or reading, is dependent upon mental content. Surely, the mental content of students brought up by parents showing these unfavorable attitudes has been adversely affected. This fact should be considered by the teacher of college-adult reading for he can utilize some compensating measures to reinforce mental content.

In the college-adult reading program at Western Michigan University we attempt to discover factors affecting reading performance through the use of an Informal Reading Inventory which is found in the appendix of the text, Reading, A Key to Academic Success. (4) The inventory, along with interviews and observations of the student, helps to individualize our reading program and to discover some of the causes of the student's reading disability. To mitigate causal factors, cooperation with people from other disciplines is necessary. We often request physicians, counselors, and academic advisors to work with us. If a reading program is to be effective, attention must be paid to the individual.

PRINCIPLE 6: The student should be taught to read effectively the texts required in his college work. Reading at no time can be taught in a vacuum even though specific reading skills may be developed in isolation. Instead reading should be taught in a sequence of events, each of which contributes to the goals of the learner. Just as a watch is more than the sum of its parts so effective reading is more than an accumulation of abilities. For the student, learning to read is an integration of skills in a forward-moving, goal-oriented process. Students want to learn how to read more effectively in mathematics, science, social studies, and English in order to accomplish their academic and professional goals. In fact, the writers question whether reading can be taught effectively at the adult level except in the content areas in which the student is actually working. Practice exercises or "busy work" as they are labeled by the mature student are not generally appreciated. From the student's point of view any activity having questionable instructional value is regarded as just so much "filler" designed by a faculty member to keep his students busy. Many of our students are working their way through the university. They are carrying heavy loads. They want to be shown how to improve

their reading ability as and while they are doing their regular academic work. Frequently, when skill-drill materials are assigned, they will ask, "Must we do all of these exercises in addition to that which is required of us by our instructors?" "Must we read this material, answer these questions, determine our percentiles, and draw graphs?" This, to the student, is busy work. Instruction should be related to the felt needs of the student, the needs he recognizes and the skills he wishes to acquire. He needs to identify main ideas in a chapter. He needs to know how to read for a purpose. He wants to make ideas his own so that after he has finished a chapter, he can recall the major ideas and the supporting facts. He wants to know how to add words to his vocabulary in such fields as chemistry and physics. He wants to know how to solve problems in the area of science and the social studies. He wants to know how to concentrate upon a reading activity. This matter of concentration is important because 92 per cent of our students point out that concentration in the process of reading is one of their greatest difficulties. In view of this, the presentation of some psychological factors affecting concentration has been made an integral part of the course.

PRINCIPLE 7: Instruction should be simple, direct, and specific. Instruction should emphasize reading as a thinking skill, as a purposeful process of identifying, interpreting, and evaluating ideas. Instruction should be concerned with practical procedures rather than with abstract theory about reading. It should consist of well-structured directions to the student as to how various reading skills can be developed. But the development of isolated reading skills is not enough. These skills must be related to one another and operate as a whole. Braam (1) in a recent article has pointed out that "there is a relation between the organization of the instructional or learning situation and the effective development of skills needed by the student." If our students are to make effective use of textbooks and reference materials, it is essential that they have guidance in the integration of reading skills. Furthermore, it is our responsibility to provide this guidance in a direct, specific, and dynamic manner.

PRINCIPLE 8: The student should evaluate his own achievement at the beginning and end of the laboratory activity. Gains in reading are observable in the student's ability to make more effective use of his textbooks. In

fact, in the opinion of the writers, this change is proof of the value of the whole instructional process. The student's estimation of this growth is of great importance to him. It means more than objective measures no matter how valid and reliable they may be. The student can determine his improvement in terms of whether or not he is able to read for a purpose. Before, he just read. The student can evaluate his performance in terms of whether or not he can quickly identify main ideas in a chapter, in a poem, and in a newspaper. He can measure his growth in terms of whether or not he has been able to master the content of the chapter and integrate new ideas with old ideas. The student can evaluate his progress in terms of the grades he has earned in his classes. Our study (6) indicates that instruction in reading results not only in gains as measured by standardized reading tests but in statistically significant gains in point-hour-ratios as well. In addition to these subjective considerations, the student should consider the change that has taken place between the time of the initial and final testing and should determine what reading skills he has yet to master. When he has finished the course, he

has made only a beginning for learning to read in our world is a continuous process which should constantly be expanded.

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